

BY GREG ALBRECHT

“...he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”  
—Psalm 103:10

## DESERVE'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH IT

Justice—the kind that satisfies human sensibilities—was served in the little frontier town of Big Whiskey. In *Unforgiven*, awarded the Oscar for Best Picture of 1992, Big Whiskey was ruled over by the sadistic sheriff Little Bill Daggett, played by Gene Hackman. Clint Eastwood, who both directed and starred in the

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movie, played the character of Will Munny, a retired gunslinger who determined to avenge a prostitute whose face had been ruthlessly slashed.

True to the genre of Western movies, and true to humanly satisfying eye-for-an-eye retributive justice, Eastwood cleaned up Big Whiskey by meeting force with superior force. *Unforgiven* satisfied movie goers because violence and death “by the sword” was visited on those who had lived “by the sword.”

The murderous rampage of Will Munny, as he purged Big

Whiskey of its sins, was terminated with a showdown in the saloon with Little Bill Daggett. Lying at the feet of Munny, bleeding out from gunshot wounds, and somehow oblivious to the mayhem he had caused in countless lives, Little Bill looks up and complains, “I don’t deserve this.” Will Munny, the avenging angel of *Unforgiven* replies, “*Deserve’s got nothing to do with it.*”

Long before Big Whiskey, another town was the setting for a radically different solution for corruption and oppression. Jerusalem, the religious center of the world, according to observant Jews, was hosting Passover. Among other things, Passover was the story of God’s dramatic rescue of Israel, achieved by the shock and awe of plagues visited on the nation of Egypt that held the Israelites in bondage. Passover remembered that God ended the “Egypt problem” with a devastating military conquest, obliterating the

armies of Pharaoh in the Red Sea. Thus Passover celebrated the superior force of God overcoming the hatred and animosity of the enemies of Israel. Passover came to be understood as an example of the justice of God.

But the Answer walked into Jerusalem, the heart and soul of religion, with a revolutionary new way of justice. In Jerusalem the military forces of the armies of Rome joined forces with the religion of Judaism to put an end (or so they thought) to the revolutionary message of Jesus, who threatened the status quo by preaching love and peace. They thought, as humans have always thought, that killing Jesus would end his message. But that didn’t work, did it?

Time stood still on that day in Jerusalem when Jesus became the once-and-for-all Answer to injustice and tyranny. In a mysterious, majestic and momentous purging of sin, Jesus won the victory by refusing to fight back. The revolution/Answer is peace achieved through his acceptance and absorption of evil and violence.

This fundamental lesson of Easter is often lost on those who throng churches clad in their Easter best. Many

“church-going,” “God-fearing” folks believe that peace and reconciliation can only be achieved when a good guy with a white hat and the fastest draw cleans up the town. Many surface celebrations of Easter completely miss the point of its mystery and miracle.

Jesus did not arrive in Jerusalem to gun down the Romans and restore the nation of Israel. *Deserve had nothing to do with it.* Jesus wasn't a brash gunslinger with the fastest gun. He came to Jerusalem to willingly die, as the Lamb of God.

*When it came to the final high-noon showdown, Jesus cleaned up the town by refusing to draw.* He came to the final showdown and accepted, received and absorbed all the hatred and violence a furious and hate-filled humanity, fueled and goaded by religion, could dish out. He came to clean up every town by the ultimate demonstration of love. He

**Jesus does not demand that we deserve his love by forgiving the unforgivable. *Deserve's got nothing to do with it.***

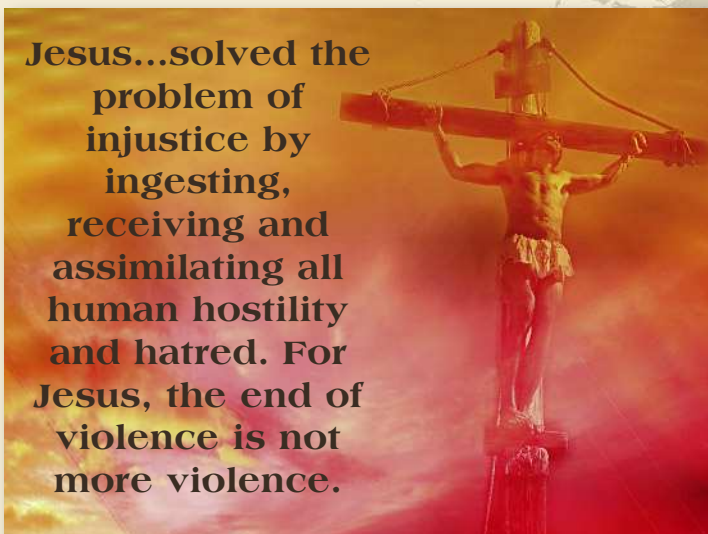
**{That's} the good news of Easter...**

didn't come to Jerusalem with punitive or retributive justice, but with reconciliation and love. *Deserve had nothing to do with it.*

Jesus didn't solve the problem of pain, suffering and abuse by beating up on the bad guys. He solved the problem of injustice by ingesting, receiving and assimilating all human hostility and hatred. For Jesus, the end of

violence is not more violence. When Jesus was being beaten he said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Jesus defeated death by walking into the midst of it, giving his life by meeting anger and hatred head on. He rose victoriously from the cross, and offers you and me



that same victory. The incredibly good news of the resurrection is that Jesus has gone to the ends of the earth to do what needs to be done so that his peace and justice may reign. We may receive the reconciliation Jesus

accomplished on his cross, but we can never earn or deserve it. Sadly, this victory is often devalued/diminished by Christless religion as it explains the love of God and his acceptance as a do-it-yourself project.

Jesus “marched into hell for a heavenly cause” but, ironically, religion has consigned him to a nose-bleed seat in the grandstand of our lives. Jesus

came to be one of us, which means that he came to be with us and live within us during the life-and-death battles we face in our lives.

Jesus is our risen Lord—not just when we hunt for eggs or enjoy an Easter lunch, but he is our risen Lord 24/7—in our homes, factories, offices, saloons, prisons, hospitals, court houses and yes, even in our churches!

Jesus is God with us, not from a distance, but up close and personal. Jesus lives with us and in us, jointly inhabiting the foxholes and trenches of our lives. He is risen!

The message of Easter does not challenge us to do the impossible: Jesus does not ask us to deserve victory over our problems,

because *deserve's got nothing to do with it.* Jesus does not demand that we find him and experience his peace of mind and justice by climbing the highest mountain and fording every stream. The mountains are taller and the streams deeper than our human resources and abilities.

Jesus does not demand that we deserve his love by forgiving the unforgivable. *Deserve's got nothing to do with it.* Jesus invites us to yield to his overtures of love, admitting our own vulnerability and spiritual incompetency, and as we do he will live in and with us, enabling us to deal with the traumas and pain of our lives. The message of Easter is that Jesus Christ can do what we can never do. The good news of Easter is that *deserve's got nothing to do with it.* □